

Sketch

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E. Hemingway

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"Oh, sure, sure, that's good stuff, too, I guess," answered Babbitt vaguely. "Well, Henry, "I guess I'll be running along. We realtors are busy men, you know. Ha! Ha! See ya' later. Maybe I can let you in on a good deal sometime."

OUTSIDE, Babbitt paused and shook his head sorrowfully. "Poor guy," he mused. "Here I offer him a chance to get outa the backwoods practically for the taking, and he starts spoutin' about the loons. Oh, well, I guess some guys just ain't got any sense of values."

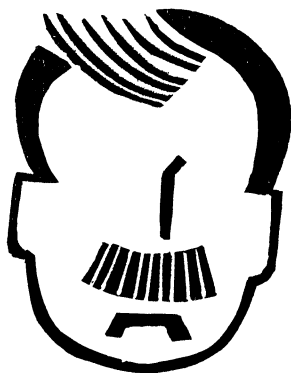
And Babbitt hurried down to road to see his next client.



E. Hemingway

Hans H. Wendel

Agron. Fr.



WHY DO Hemingway's works leave the average reader's mind baffled as to their sense and meaning? Because to explain them would be just as impossible as to give some interpretation to the last twenty-five years.

The postwar period has been the favorite topic for many of the contemporaneous writers of all nations, but only very few can compare favorably with Hemingway's description of it. One of the principal factors which separate him from most of his colleagues is his cosmopolitanism. As a matter of fact, all action in Hemingway's books is laid in Western Europe, where the last decades had their nervous centers; his characters, his philosophy and his settings are European, and his books can be fully understood only by those who know that continent and its literature.

It is true that all of his heroes are American by birth; but that is only a coincidence which makes it convenient for the author to draw his conclusions more independently and without narrow national prejudices. Besides this point, his stark sense of reality, his masterful language and his technical knowledge put his works clearly in first place as documents of our time.

Outstanding in all of Hemingway's books is the leading man; and remarkable about him is the vagueness of characterization. If one gets to know him, one always finds the same person, a symbol of his time. He lives in a heavy atmosphere of futility; sometimes he is idealistic-minded; but he knows that the fight for his ideal is doomed from the beginning, that the forces of evil hold the world firmly in their grip. This gives some reason to his enjoying life while it lasts, and also to his heroic acts born out of the sentiment of "quand meme". He surrounds himself with men of his own kind, loves to associate with the lower classes of the people, and holds in contempt a life according to the ideals and rules of the middle classes. Often, however, the hero is somewhat deformed by an exaggeration of his boy scout qualities, and for a while one has the impression of reading through the book the day dreams of an immature youth. This sentiment never quite disappears; only its strength varies and sometimes its effect is a ridiculous one, sometimes a romantic one.

THE romantic element—except for the love element—is provided for principally by the settings. The description of the country holds an important place in the books. Although they are written in a very matter-of-fact style, the landscapes of Italy or Spain as Hemingway paints them often resemble those of the great romanticists of the nineteenth century. The people who live in those countries, even if they hold major roles, are only sketched to furnish a background. The author understands brilliantly how to give us a clear impression of their outward appearance and their general character in a few hasty lines. But even for illiterate peasants they are too uncomplicated in their actions and reactions. This lack of detail, accentuated still by their manner of speech, may be responsible for much of the original vigor we meet in every one of the author's writings.

The plot of the book generally does not need any special attention. It evolves naturally out of the character of the hero and history itself; as it covers only a short time it is un-

complicated and full of the same atmosphere which identifies its main person.

Contemplating Hemingway's works as a whole, we find that his two best known books cover the beginning and the end of the postwar period. Robert, of "For Whom the Bell Tolls," and Henry, of "A Farewell to Arms," are both men of this time and thus closely related. What gives them a distinctive mark is that Henry starts out as an idealist and gradually becomes a disappointed and disgusted realist, a young man typical of our time. There is a new kind of life forming in Robert, however, who feels that it is his task and purpose in life to do his bit for something he holds worth fighting and dying for.

NOT only the heroes, but the background as well, advance twenty years between the two books. The peasants and soldiers in "A Farewell to Arms" are sometimes heroic, but most of the time like a herd of cattle. They do not know what it is all about; they do know, though, that their fathers and grandfathers before have been killed on the many European battlefields, and that by some inevitable law known only to the rich and mighty, it now is their turn. The people in "For Whom the Bell Tolls," on the contrary, know what they are fighting for and why and thus are determined to stick to their cause even if it may seem to be doomed.

ALL other works of Hemingway can be given a place between the two principal books. The one that does not fit in anywhere, however, is "The Sun Also Rises"; it is not very clear what, exactly, the author meant by it. Perhaps it is an attempt to arouse the attention of the readers towards the general chaos of the twenties by painting it more strongly than necessary. Maybe he was at the time under the influence of A. Gide and tried to give a modern version of the Frenchman's philosophy as expressed in "L'Immoraliste".

Briefly, each of Hemingway's books constitutes a solid unity, drawn with vigor and sometimes even reality. Together they are one of the mightiest testimonies of the postwar period. But they do not seem to carry an ultimate goal in them, which is necessary for every great book. They fail to give us any valuable sentiments or ideals for the fulfillment of which we again have a right to hope.